

DON'T BE ALARMED

Are you suffering from beep overload on your watch?
GEORGE DEVEREASE, senior loss prevention executive
 with the UK P&I Club, offers some help with the problem...

A couple of weeks ago I visited a friend who was very keen to show off his new kitchen. In pride of place among his new 'mod cons' was an American-style fridge freezer, a very imposing double-doored specimen with chilled water and ice dispenser.

'Very impressive,' I said. 'That's nothing, wait till you open it!' he responded. So, with due reverence, I approached the behemoth and opened the door to be greeted with a muted 'ding dong'.

'How cool is that?!' he exclaimed. 'It beeps when you open the door and again when it's closed; it also chimes if you leave the door open too long.'

I must admit I did not share his enthusiasm, as I thought it was completely unnecessary. I know when the door of a fridge is open and when it is closed... but then again, do I?

If I am cooking the Sunday roast, have three pots on the boil, something to get out of the oven and I quickly run to the fridge to get some butter, do I really pay attention to shutting the door?

A simple little 'ding dong' may be all the reassurance I need to ensure I am doing my job properly and not wasting a fridge-full of food.

It may sometimes feel to those of us who keep bridge watch at sea that in the modern era there are a hundred and one alarms, whistles, screens and lights that sound, flash and tell us what we are doing or not doing. All of these are designed to help us maintain a good lookout and assess the situation around us – but do you sometimes feel like I did when my friend showed me his fridge? Do you sometimes feel that some of these alarms and chimes are unnecessary or, even worse, distracting?

If that's the case, then we must ask ourselves the question: 'How do I best sieve through this sensory assault and make the most of the data that is being presented to me?'

We are well aware that in many claims there is often a human error element, and this is especially true of navigational claims. More often than not,



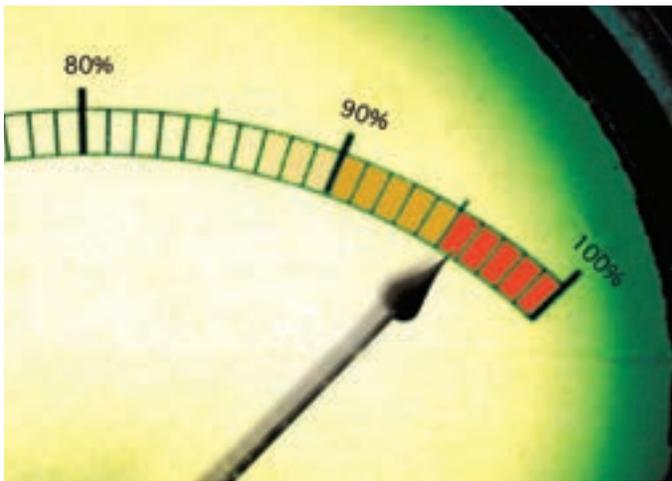
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this human element failure is attributed to sensory overload – but I would argue that this is not the root cause of the situation; rather, it is a symptom of 'filter failure'.

Modern technology is without question an improver and enabler within the bridge environment, but without proper training in its limitations or over-reliance, it becomes a hindrance. As too is the failure to properly set up filters within the system to ensure only the most relevant data is shown.

The industry is alive to this potential problem and as such it became mandatory, as of 1 January 2017, for all seafarers to be properly trained in the use of Electronic Chart Display and Information Systems (ECDIS) as described in the 2010 Manila Amendments to the Standards of Training, Certification & Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW) Convention and Code.

Now, just over a year and a half after the introduction of this ruling, it stands to reason that we



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George
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should see fewer navigational error claims. And yet they keep occurring – why is this?

There is no one simple answer to the above question. Watchkeeping at sea is a dynamic environment which is continually changing, with a multitude of variables to consider.

One particular area of concern is alarm fatigue. If we go back to the example of cooking in my friend's kitchen, it is true to say that in a normal day-to-day routine the fridge beeping at me is not very useful; but it really does come into its own when I am busy cooking my Sunday roast. This is similarly true of alarms in the bridge. When on a cruising watch in the middle of the ocean, alarms can be dealt with quickly, with little or no thought. However, in a busy shipping situation during the morning 0400-0800 watch

● ● ● Get into the routine of verbalising what you're doing: say aloud which alarm you hear, what action you're taking and why



transiting the Singapore Straits, alarms may not be so promptly dealt with or interrogated, and may be silenced without due consideration, simply to give the OOW time to think.

Yet, this is when we need those alarms the most – so how do we beat the impulse to simply silence the alarm without interrogating it? How do we get the alarm to assist us in our duties and make the correct decisions in an otherwise stressful situation? How do we beat alarm fatigue?

First and foremost, one has to understand the systems that are being used, but also where and when they alarm. The system needs to be set up in such a way that the filters work best for the OOW, and that they are presented with the most relevant and actionable data so as to alarm as little as possible. Thus, when they do alarm, we will know to interrogate what the alarm is and take the corresponding action.

One of the best ways to do this is to verbalise what you are doing. This may seem strange at first – but remember the VDR is always listening, and voicing your actions will be of immense help to anyone investigating an incident. Moreover, by getting into this routine during quiet watches, it becomes second nature and will greatly assist the OOW during the busier, more stressful watches, helping to avoid alarm fatigue. By stating what is alarming and what the alarm represents, it will automatically drive the individual to interrogate it.

For example: 'ECDIS alarm, ECDIS alarm is crossing cross-track distance to port, safe to navigate visually, by radar and echo sounder'. By the utterance of this one sentence you have confirmed where the alarm is, what it is, what action the OOW is going to take and what supporting data he/she has used to come to this conclusion. The alarm has been used for its stated purpose to aid decision-making, and you have interrogated the alarm and come up with the best course of action.

We recommend during your next watch, try this simple two-step tactic and see if it helps avoid alarm fatigue and promotes a safer, calmer bridge environment. 📌